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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL WOMAN OF COURAGE IN FINLAND: ULLA  
ANTILLA

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Ulla Anttila has been a member of Finland's Parliament since 1992 and has taken the lead as the Chairperson of the Finnish Parliament's Human Rights Caucus on a variety of women's issues at home and abroad. In particular, her work to combat trafficking-in-persons in the Nordic-Baltic region has helped transform the Finnish government's approach to this critical problem. In just a few short years, the Finnish government has gone from a position of denial (there's no problem here!) to one of regional and EU-wide leadership on combatting TIP. Ulla's efforts to raise public awareness and to publicly campaign for change have helped create a sea change in public perceptions and in government policy as reflected in Finland's shift from Tier 2 to Tier 1 on the State Department's TIP Report.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ulla has also been a vocal activist and advocate for the rights of the disabled, serving as the Chairperson of Parliament's Group for Disabled People. Inspired by her oldest daughter, Allie, who has several disabilities, Ulla has fought to raise the awareness of Finnish society about the thousands of children and adults living with disabilities; and has challenged the Finnish government to develop new standards to accommodate the disabled. One of her greatest successes was in drafting and sponsoring legislation that required disabled access in all public buildings, apartments and public transportation, including smaller and rural bus stops. Despite opposition from various groups (chiefly over cost), Ulla led the effort to pass the legislation, and then kept pressure on Finland's government for several years until it finally budgeted funds to make implementation possible. In her travels, most recently, for example, to Ethiopia, she tirelessly urges countries not to forget the rights of some of their most vulnerable citizens.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a country that is proud of the fact that it was the first in the world to grant women suffrage (in 1907) and has a long tradition of women in government, including the current President of Finland, one could argue that it would be easy to fully support the status quo. Ulla's style and penchant for choosing causes that many people would prefer to quietly ignore have not always made her the most popular MP with the government, especially in Finland where consensus and homogeneity are the rule. But she is a politician and activist with the strength of her convictions who has made a real difference in the lives of thousands in Finland and throughout the region.

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